

On Discernment: Voting

©Elizabeth Liebert, SNJM

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Discernment is...

“That habit of faith by which we are properly disposed to hear God’s Word and properly disposed to respond to the Word in the practical circumstances of our lives.” (Luke Johnson)

“Any process of sifting, weighing or discriminating what is of God from what might arise from other sources, so that we can respond with integrity to what we hear.” (Elizabeth Liebert)

“The process of opening our lives and decisions to God and being attentive to what we see with the aid of Divine Light.” (Nancy Bieber)

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Complexities...

- “Who has known the mind of God? (Rom 11:34)” We only get glimpses of God
- I can never be certain that I know God’s will for myself or for another
- Move forward in trust and humility
- Even the desire for God is God’s gift
- Even our mistakes are accounted for in God’s wisdom

Some Scriptures on Discernment



- Deuteronomy 30:11-14 and 15-20
- I Kings 19:14
- Ps. 25:5
- Ps. 119:34
- Mt. 7: 17, Lk. 6:43-45
- Gal. 5:22
- I Thes. 5:20
- Lk. 8: 19-21
- And many more!

Steps for discerning a decision

- Invite God to the process, asking for the grace to sense what God desires and the freedom to do it
- Name the decision before you
- Gather and evaluate appropriate data
- Prayerfully weigh the options and formulate a tentative decision
- Pause for a time of confirmation
- Finalize the decision and implement it
- Look back over the process and see what you can learn in hindsight

The sample case: voting

- The social contract in the US has become extremely polarized
- None of the issues is so simple as to be able to be reduced to formulaic prescriptions
- Our system of government in the US depends on civility, thoughtful dialogue, compromise, truthfulness and acting with integrity
- Distinguish values from strategies and candidates from issues
- Understand the Church's role in the voting process

Discernment as applied to voting:

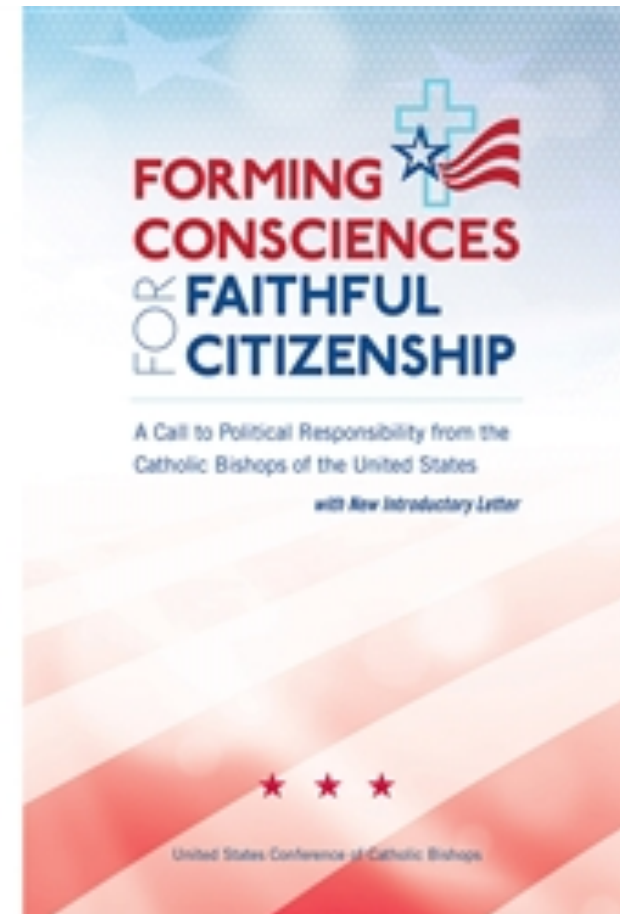
- Begin (always) by asking God to enlighten you and give you interior freedom to mark your ballot in tune with God's heart as far as it is in your ability to do so
- Key discernment question for voting: In the light of the political, economic, moral and social issues surrounding us, what are the better options in light of the persons and issues on the ballot?
- Gather data

Resources for gathering data

- Catholic Social Teaching, statements of popes, including “Fratelli Tutti,” Chapter 5*
- “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship”**
- Voter’s Pamphlet
- Election advertising
- Media treatments

*http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html

**<https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/upload/forming-consciences-for-faithful-citizenship.pdf>



Community in the midst of differences (cf. “Fratelli Tutti”, Ch. 6, 7)

- Affirm the other person’s good will and that he or she has carefully thought through the issues
- Seek out that person’s wisdom by open-ended and sincere questions
- Put aside needing to agree, needing to convince the other in favor of *understanding what matters to the other*
- Focus on the deeper unity in Christ that transcends the differences

It's not perfect. It's often messy.
But, in faith, it is possible to stay united as one
community in Christ in spite of our differences.

Daily Examen: Discernment for daily life

- Begin with some moments of gratitude and thanksgiving
- Ask for the grace to see where God was active in your day and how you responded
- Look back with God through the day (event, etc.)
- Respond to God about what you see, giving thanks for the graces and asking for any forgiveness and healing that you might need
- Pray about tomorrow

Works Cited:

- Luke Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*. Abingdon, 1983.
- Elizabeth Liebert, *The Way of Discernment: Spiritual Practices for Decision Making*. Westminster John Knox, 2008.
- Nancy Bieber, *Decision Making and Spiritual Discernment*. Skylight Paths, 2012.